1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

as several Lepchas said when the point was raised 'Who can force a grown woman against her will?' More distantly related women, such as 'aunts', may put up a certain amount of semi-playful resistance, but no rancour is felt if it is overborne.

It is considered to be an act of excessively bad taste to copulate with a heritable wife in her husband's presence, or in such situations that there is a possibility of his witnessing it. These legalised adulteries usually take place during the husband's temporary absence, or else outside the house, in the forests or fields or field-houses; these outdoor encounters are usually very brief, and have a slightly romantic flavour. Copulation inside the house has the advantage of giving longer time, but it also exposes the couple to questionable remarks and a good deal of teasing.

One of the results of this situation is that almost all boys and young men get their first real sexual experience and training from an older married woman. Elder brothers usually explicitly instruct their younger brothers in their rights. In Lepcha theory a woman should never make direct sexual advances—the common Lepcha words for sexual activity are, like the English ones, transitive and one-directioned—but in point of fact I found that in nearly every case men had had their first real sexual experience with the wife of an 'elder brother' or 'uncle' at the woman's direct invitation and solicitation. This is considered altogether desirable; although sexual activity is thought to be as natural and as necessary as eating, it is necessary that boys should be taught to do it properly. Thus Chudo said one day 'If I caught Chimpet (the son of his elder brother Tafoor) sleeping with my wife I shouldn't be cross at all; on the contrary I should be very pleased, for she would be teaching him how to do it properly and I would know that he was in the hands of a good teacher! On the other hand, if I caught a married man, who had a right to sleep with my wife, doing so I should reproach them for their lack of shame in doing in my presence what might better be done in my absence; if I was really angry I should tell other people about it, so that everybody might know how shameless the man had been.'

I have already suggested that the *ptso* was possibly earlier a geographical unit; if this were the case, it seems to me possible that these permissive regulations were evolved to meet the special circumstances. For, with the *ptso* as the geographical unit, the young men would have had no possible sexual partners except through adultery or incest; and, as numerous examples show, such

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

the ages of fifty and thirty; the remaining seven are between twenty and thirty and for them there is still some chance of producing a child, for though copulation normally starts at or before puberty the average age for bearing the first child (worked out from the women of Lingthem) is over twenty-two; there are only three instances of a woman bearing a child before she was twenty. Most exceptionally for a primitive community it was possible in Zongu to get the exact age of every individual for the following reason. It is absolutely essential for participation in all lamaist ceremonies for every Lepcha to know in which year of the twelve-year 'animal' cycle[17] they were born, for this affects birth and marriage, the diagnosis of disease, the suitability or otherwise of individual exorcists, and many other occasions in ordinary life. Also after he has completed his third (or exceptionally his fourth) cycle—that is to say when he is 36 or 48—it is obligatory for a Lepcha to make prophetic consultation as to the hazards and misfortunes which await him in the next twelve years. Although no Lepcha can state his age in years, everybody knows their 'animal' year, and with few exceptions, which can be checked by cross-reference, the number of cycles they have completed.

I have not been able to make up my mind as to the reason for the great sterility of the Lepchas. It would seem as though it were the women rather than the men who were sterile, for in the greater number of cases of a man remarrying on account of his first wife's sterility the second wife has borne him children. A suggestion put forward by some Lepchas with whom I discussed the matter, though others considered it absolutely ludicrous, is that sterility may be due to premature copulation. The Lepchas do not recognise and have no word for physical puberty, and most of them believe that the signs of female puberty (swelling of the breasts and beginning of menses) are the result of copulation and that therefore girls have to be copulated with in order that they may develop. A number of people admitted (if they were women) copulating with men when they were only ten or eleven, or (if they were men) more or less raping young girls. A number of the sterile women however emphatically deny such premature experience, and I have no reason to suppose they were lying; and anyhow on the medical evidence it seems doubtful whether such premature experience would cause subsequent sterility, though it might render childbirth more difficult.

[17] This will be more fully explained in the next chapter; see also Appendix III.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

betrothed, but of these three were mental defectives, one was a cripple, and two were carpenters just returned from the state school at Gangtok;[1] the remaining two were adopted children, and in both cases the adopting fathers said they were searching for suitable spouses.

Some of the boys and girls may have had a little sporadic sexual experience before betrothal, especially if their elder siblings of the same sex are married; but it is by no means unusual for both parties to be complete virgins at the time of betrothal. The period between betrothal and marriage is usually the time of greatest sexual adventure and promiscuity; but this naturally depends on the affection the two betrothed feel for one another and, to a lesser extent, on the distance between their two villages; a betrothed pair who are fond of one another may quite probably be sexually exclusive; where they do not get on, and particularly if there is overt hostility, they are likely to look elsewhere.

A marriage is never arranged by the parents of the child concerned; were the parents to do so either the parties would die young or the marriage would break up. In Lingthem the marriages are usually proposed by the Mandal and negotiated through the intermediary of the child's uncles and grandparents on both sides, and especially the father's elder brother, or if such a man does not exist, anyone who stands in a similar relationship. Thus, in the marriage of Datoop's children, Tafoor acted as the 'father's elder brother'; actually Tafoor is nineteen years younger than Datoop and they are four generations removed from a common ancestor (their respective paternal grandmothers were biological sisters); Datoop was an only child and Tafoor the most responsible related man of the same generation; since they are connected by females they are obviously of different *ptso*.

All the real marriage negotiations are carried on between two *bek-bu* (between-men) representing each side. Any experienced and tactful man with the exception of the spouse's father, who knows the correct things to say and the correct way to say them and has a sufficient vocabulary of *tang-bor* may take this rôle; in Lingthem the Mandal has performed this office for nearly every couple in the last twenty years, but in other villages a variety of people perform this rôle and the choice of *bek-bu* is a personal one dictated by the friendliness of the betrothed person and his family. In by far the greater number of cases the two children to be betrothed do not

[1] See Chapter Four, p. 121, and Chapter Six, p. 153.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

ii

584 Betrothal does not by any means necessarily imply sexual connection between the betrothed. It does, however, usually indicate the commencement of sexual activity for both parties, and almost [833] always for the boys. The majority of Lepcha men receive their sexual initiation and education from a potential levirate spouse— 836 the wife of an 'elder brother' or 'uncle'—and very often at the woman's direct invitation. It is a Lepcha axiom that women never make the first advances and most people repeat this statement; but a number of men when recounting their own early sex experiences tell of direct invitation and solicitation from these potential spouses; timid Jiroong indeed was at the age of fifteen as nearly raped as it is possible for a man to be by his elder brother's wife. Fathers instruct their sons as to the women they have a right to sleep with, and the women whom, though potentially heritable, they must avoid because their fathers have already slept with them.[3] Elder brothers, too, on their marriage give their younger brothers formal permission to sleep with their wives. These legitimate copulations must be practised discreetly and nearly always take place during the temporary absence of the real spouse. It is considered desirable that a boy should first sleep with a woman older than himself so as to be taught how to do it properly. For the Lepchas there is nothing incongruous in a man sleeping with a woman twice his age, and it would seem indeed that young men find older women more attractive; in the few cases where a young man has been able to choose his own bride they have always chosen elder women. It has already been remarked that fully grown younger brothers transfer many of their attitudes towards their fathers to their elder brothers; I find it, however, impossible to gauge to what extent if any the elder brothers' wives are equated with the mothers.

833 Although the great majority of men receive their sexual initiation 836 from an elder sister-in-law, a few have their first experience with contemporaries. Thus Chimpet has twice slept with a girl of his own age at Parfok at her invitation; he enjoyed the experience and would like to repeat it, but does not want to marry the girl because he does not like her. Similarly Rigya was seduced at the age of fifteen by a girl of the same age in a neighbouring village;

[3] See Chapter Six, p. 153.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

it was not her first experience, though it was his. Subsequently his parents tried to betroth him to her, but she was already bespoke.

I unfortunately was not able to obtain as much or as precise detail on the early sexual life of women as I was of men;[4] from such information and reports as I was able to gather it would seem that potential sororate spouses play a much smaller rôle in the initiation of young girls, chiefly no doubt because they generally live some way away. When they are not deflowered by their spouse (this happens sometimes) girls would seem to start their sexual life with unrelated men, often it would appear with visitors to their village. Among the Lepchas the difficulty of talking to women on such subjects was not, as more usually happens, the jealousy of the husbands, but the fact that almost every woman from eight to eighty interpreted any sort of special attention as an attempt at seduction, an attempt which—no matter what their youth or age—they had no intention of repelling.

Until the husband brings his wife home, and indeed till the birth of the first child, Lepcha men and women have complete sexual freedom at every point where this freedom does not endanger the social fabric; that is to say that all potential partners outside the stringent incest categories are permissible, provided that adultery, as the Lepchas understand the term, is not flagrant, continuous or emotionally important. After the birth of the first child adultery —that is to say connection with a woman who is not a potential wife—on the part of the father is thought to endanger the life of the child or children. Except for casual encounters at the forest or at feasts my impression is that adultery is uncommon, and that copulation with permitted partners only takes place intermittently in the absence of the actual spouses.

Lepcha sexual experience can be divided into four categories: legitimate copulation with one's spouse, which almost always takes place in the house; semi-legitimate copulation with potential sororate and levirate spouses, which usually takes place either in the house during the husband's temporary absence or in casual encounters in the forest or field-houses, since it is considered tactless to allow the husband to witness such copulations; thirdly, intrigues with unmarried girls which entail clandestine visits by the young man by night; and, lastly, sudden and clandestine encounters

[4] I was told the precise details of the early sex experience of at least half the men of Lingthem, but only three or four of the women. It was one of the most popular subjects of conversation among the men at the monastery feasts.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

836 which may or may not be adulterous, in the fields or forests or at
837 big feasts. The last-named are always excessively hurried and rather romantic; hurried because there is the fear of being surprised and romantic because they are unforeseen and unprepared. Occasionally to seduce an unmarried girl men will promise to give them presents of money and clothes and they will do so if the woman consents; she will either tell her parents that she has bought the new clothes, or, if this is too improbable, that she has borrowed them. If the woman refuses, men do not insist. It quite often happens that a girl will give her lover small presents—straps she has woven herself or food smuggled out of the house in her dress. It is said that presents are not given to seduce married women.

836 If unmarried and unrelated men and women wish to sleep together, the man will find out from the girl her exact sleeping position in her house; then at his own home he will wait till he can hear everybody sleeping, creep out on hands and knees, run to her home, which may be a couple of villages away, and creep in beside her. He must return to his own home before cockcrow. Normally if a man is surprised he will run away and not come back again; but it occasionally happens that these originally clandestine intrigues become socially recognised and the lover goes to live, either temporarily or permanently, with his mistress, particularly if the latter is past the age of childbearing. Thus Patek's 'elder grandmother', the sixty-six-year-old Nandjému, has as paramour a lover of the same age, a lama who travels round the country making prayer wheels; whenever he is in the neighbourhood of Lingthem he lives with the old woman as her husband. Similarly Kurma lived with his first wife, Gongyop's sister, for some years before he married her.[5] If the wife is of childbearing age she will more often go to live with her lover, especially if he is a householder in his own right; thus Tobgé's sister lived with Nahyeun, Tempa's sister with Jiroong, and Ongden's second wife with her husband for considerable periods before their marriages were legitimised.

837 Sex does not form part of the Lepcha pattern of hospitality, but if a visitor can make his own arrangements this is agreeable to all parties. In such cases once the visitor has got the girl's consent to sleep with him he learns from her the exact position of her sleeping place, and visits her as quietly as possible as soon as the rest of the company are apparently asleep.

[5] See Chapter Fifteen, pp. 398–399.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

Karma and his wife continued to live with Gongyop for several more years; but on the death of the former's step-father they went to live with his mother. His wife died in 1932, and his mother the following year. He soon married again, and his second wife bore him two children, the first of which died shortly after birth. Six months after the birth of the second child his wife died; and it is her mother who at present keeps house for him. Last year he was again betrothed and hopes to be married next year. In the meantime his future bride already has a baby seven months old. Karma believes in "Bloomsbury" morals; for he lived with his first wife for six years before he troubled to marry her; and when he finally decided to regularise his position he even went to the trouble of carrying out all the preliminary formalities, including a formal betrothal. He never thought it necessary to be faithful to any of his wives, and believes he is the father of at least two bastards. Of all our informants he was the most forthcoming and particularly enjoyed talking about himself. He was much more arrogant than the average Lepcha, and would probably have fitted better into a somewhat more forceful society. Had the army been open to him as a profession he would quickly have become a non-commissioned officer; for above all things he liked to order others about. For this reason he enjoys his post of Karbari, and I imagine will be far less happy when he has to obey orders rather than give them himself. The others think he is proud and a boaster, but say that he always speaks the truth. He is the type that in an European culture would be found standing at the street corner, hands in pockets, with a cigarette drooping from his lips. He would quickly degenerate if he ever lived in a town, and might easily take to a life of crime. I never liked him very much, but of all the Lingtem people he was easily the most useful.

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The Hlaribu does not live in Lingtem; but since he is an active member of the local monastery and appears in many

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

587 More guests now started to arrive, and as each one came in [788] he prostrated himself in front of the altar and then sat down on the floor. By eleven o'clock it was said that some 130 guests were present; and certainly there was not even room on the floor to stretch out one's legs. We had to sit cross-legged on a small carpet, which was unfortunately placed too far away from the wall to enable one to lean back, as a result of which I soon had an intolerable ache in the small of my back.

At about midday the Lamas started to tune up their instruments and to chant in a desultory way. All but one read out of a book. I was told that the chanting consisted in the endless repetition of the names of hundreds of gods. No [781] one paid the slightest attention to what was going on; nor did the Lamas themselves seem to concentrate overmuch on what they were doing. The chanting alternated with bursts of instrumental playing, with frequent intervals for drinking in between. After a time the whole performance degenerated into a semi-somnolent drone, rather like bees on a hot afternoon in summer: but every now and then a loud bang on the cymbals would wake the rest of the performers into a brief frenzy of cacophony, which soon subsided into a drone again. Apart from the music, the atmosphere in the Black Hole of Calcutta must, I imagine, have been somewhat like this.

While we were waiting hopefully for something to happen I asked Dhawa to find out if the bride and bridegroom were [836] previously acquainted. This caused much laughter in view of the fact that she is expecting a baby in about three months' time.

The bridal party arrived at about one o'clock; but since this was a second marriage for both the parties concerned Ongden did not trouble to escort the bride from her home. As the party arrived he was standing outside the house, but he paid not the slightest attention to the procession; nor did anyone take any notice of him. The bridal party went straight inside the house and took up their places along one wall. The bride kept the lower part of her face hidden in a